

State Senator • Irma Clark-Coleman

Serving the 3rd District Constituents in Detroit, Dearborn & River Rouge

Legislation Moves to Change Kindergarten Entrance Age

Sen. Clark-Coleman opposes a package of bills that would effectively limit educational resources for students and cut funding from school districts. Senate Bills 324 and 325 change Michigan's Kindergarten entry age to five on or before September 1.

Currently, the state requires students to be five years old on or before December 1. Those who support the bills say the age change would save the state money.

Fewer students enrolled in Kindergarten mean fewer dollars the state would be required to pay in foundation allowances. For this school year, there are about 120,000 students listed in Kindergarten. The state estimates it pays \$7,100 per student.

Under the plan, the age of entrance would be moved back one month each of the next three years until the target of September 1 is reached. The incremental change is widely viewed as a means to lessen the financial and personal impact of changing the elementary school entry age.

Beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, students entering Kindergarten must be five years old on or before November 1. The following school year would move the required age to October 1 and, finally, in the 2008-2009 school year, all Kindergarten students must be five years old by September 1.

There will always be a group of children born in the last three months of the year. Children benefit from quality early childhood education programs and should have access to quality programs at the earliest possible age.



At-risk children stand to lose more educational ground with the change. If they are already not receiving the necessary support, their educational journey will be delayed for an extra 12 months. What makes it even more complicated is that the Head Start age correlates with Kindergarten. Pre-school intervention would also be set back for another year.

The Tri-county Alliance of superintendents recently visited Lansing and indicated their strong opposition to the legislation. The group, which represents Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties, believes the age deadline would severely undercut state and federal funding and limit learning opportunities for the students who need it most.

The bottom line is that children need support in order to learn. If they do not get that support at home, then public schools should be able to intervene. If intervention is foiled because of new age requirements, what's to become of our future?

Contact your state elected officials and tell them what you think about this legislation.

How to Contact Me

Lansing Office

P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536
Toll-Free: 1-866-747-7803
Phone: 517-373-0990
Fax: 517-373-5338

Dearborn Office

4407 Roemer Street
Dearborn, MI 48126-3485
Phone: 313-584-3749
Fax: 313-584-3937

Office Hours

Mondays & Fridays 1-3 pm

E-Mail

seniclark-coleman@senate.michigan.gov

Website

www.senate.mi.gov/clark-coleman



Dear Constituents,

There are several unresolved issues that must be settled so that Michigan can return to a state of vibrancy. Chief among them is a balanced budget. We expect budget bills to be released at the end of the month. At that time, negotiations will begin.

While we wait for that process to gain momentum, personal insurance rates seem to be rising with no end in sight. Statewide, education funding is lacking. There is no

community that remains untouched by the education challenge facing our state. As lawmakers, we must address issues that are important to the quality of life for our residents. Our decisions must be wise and for the greater good.

I am committed to protecting programs that benefit our most vulnerable citizens. I am prepared to make the hard choices for the good of every citizen of this state. I urge you to do the same in your own neighborhoods. Protect the seniors and children. Report crimes as you witness them and stay in contact with all of your elected officials.

Sincerely,

Irma Clark-Coleman

State Senator • 3rd District

Red Cross Tests “Power of 4”



The southeastern Michigan region of the Red Cross has begun a new campaign to increase the number of donors and combat low blood supply. Called the “Power of 4,” the recruitment drive asks citizens to donate blood four times a year and to invite four friends to join them. Community groups are asked to hold blood drives four times a year.

Legislators Form Insurance Work Group

As a member of the Insurance and Financial Services committee, Sen. Clark-Coleman has consistently advocated for affordable insurance rates for homes and autos. The Metro Detroit area reports some of the highest insurance rates in the country, a national ranking that is both unacceptable and undesirable.

In response to lawmakers and other state officials, a group of legislators formed the Insurance Work Group to investigate auto and home insurance rates in Michigan and their impact on consumers. The average citizen could answer the group’s inquiries on coverage in two words – prohibitive and inaccessible.

The group has met on three occasions to date. Sen. Clark-Coleman has attended each meeting. What they’ve

discussed so far is territorial rating, how companies create territories, the history of no-fault auto insurance, and the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA), which pays unlimited benefits to individuals suffering from catastrophic injuries sustained in auto accidents.

Recent comments made by some work group members indicate they find Metro Detroit rates appropriate and any pricing break will cause out-county rates to rise. The entire state of Michigan has been hit with disastrously high insurance rates, leading citizens and local groups to wonder aloud how long insurers and their supporters will continue to pit city against suburb to justify unfair rates and limited access.

A recent report by Insurance Commissioner Linda Watters shows



that insurance rates in Metro Detroit are unaffordable. Since the state requires every driver to have insurance, officials have a responsibility to make sure the public can afford it.

Budget Update

Governor Granholm introduced her Executive Budget recommendations for fiscal year 2005-2006. The budget reflects General Fund spending of \$8.9 billion. As an established priority,

Gov. Granholm has allocated the majority of the budget for education (24%) and health and human services (45%).

These budget recommendations are the beginning of a negotiating process between the governor’s

office and state lawmakers. Sen. Clark-Coleman will keep you posted as the process unfolds.

Smaller High Schools Key to Future Student Success

Sen. Clark-Coleman is the primary sponsor of a legislative package that will allow school districts to create smaller high schools to raise low performance and poor test scores statewide.

The bills are a part of an initiative that would award zero-interest loans up to \$15 million to qualifying school districts around the state. These districts could either build or renovate existing buildings to educate no more than 500 students. Larger districts with 20,000 or more students would qualify for loans up to \$30 million.

Clark-Coleman Receives HFCC Role Model Award

Henry Ford Community College (HFCC) in Dearborn recently honored State Senator Irma Clark-Coleman with the Gene L. Brazell Community Role Model award. She received the honor before a capacity crowd during the HFCC Women's Recognition Luncheon.

For two years, the college's Focus on Women (FOW) program has celebrated women who uplift the community through service and example. General Motors Foundation's Debbie Dingell was the first award recipient last year.

"Sen. Clark-Coleman is an extraordinary role model for

"Students perform better when their education is personalized," Sen. Clark-Coleman said. "Smaller schools would promote and sustain the atmosphere of camaraderie, something that is lost in larger schools."

School districts would be required to begin repayment of the loans five years after receipt of the funds, through millages or district budgets. State officials would seek private funding to help with the cost of running the new schools.

women and all citizens," said HFCC President Andrew A. Mazzara as he introduced the Senator to luncheon attendees. "As the first in her family to graduate from college, she has a deep commitment to higher education and to help the residents of the metropolitan Detroit area better their lives through education."

As she accepted the award, Sen. Clark-Coleman said, "I am thrilled and honored to be chosen from among so many great women in Michigan. I believe in the mission of Henry Ford Community College and I support women who follow their dreams."



Education Update

The Cherry Commission on Higher Education Report reported 19 recommendations to raise the standards for high school students in preparation for college and the workplace. Currently, only about one in four Michigan students entering high school meets the goal of taking college-ready courses.

Gov. Granholm signed into law measures that replace the MEAP with the Michigan Merit Exam beginning in the 2006-07 school year. At the same time, the governor moved to increase Merit Scholarships to \$4,000 beginning with the class of 2007 (today's high school sophomores).

Every student who completes two years of college (earning an associate degree), or achieves junior status at a four-year institution, or completes a technical program would be awarded the scholarship, making Michigan the first state in the nation to reward students for completing two years of college.

Social Security Privatization Deals A Losing Hand

Currently, more than 1.6 million Michigan residents including seniors, disabled, widows, and orphans receive regular monthly Social Security benefit checks. In 2002, some 96% of Michigan's 1.2 million seniors received Social Security benefits. And Social Security is the only source of income for nearly a third of Michigan seniors. Each and every person receiving benefits is just another reason why Social Security must be protected.

But good public policy goes beyond protecting today's citizens. It protects future generations as well, and that is yet another reason

why the President's plan to privatize Social Security is simply bad policy.

Privatization of Social Security risks the future of our children and our children's children. It steals their opportunity to secure a foothold in the financial stability of their retirement years. As youth and even young adults, they may view retirement as an occurrence that is a lifetime away, which it may be. However, it is up to us, we who have lived longer and have experienced the uncertainties of life, to make sure their vision isn't obstructed by the false hysteria being instilled by the current Administration.

This country will be better served when both Democrats and Republicans collaborate on efforts that will truly protect Social Security solvency. Let's work on a tax plan that places a proportional burden on those who earn the most. Let's increase the rate of savings by creating incentives for those who save.

Dismantling a system that secures dignity for those who have invested their lives in America is short-sighted and deceitful. Let's not gamble away the futures of the next working generation.



State Senator
Irma Clark-Coleman

P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536



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Parenting Classes Open to Detroit Residents

Parent University, a program sponsored by the Detroit Community Justice Partnership, is entering into its second session with two more sessions scheduled for the year. The program provides support and encouragement for parents, reinforces and builds upon existent parenting skills, and informs parents of resources and services.

The parenting courses are available to residents of the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th police precincts. Classes are held at 7800 W. Outer Drive on Wednesday evenings for eight weeks from 6 – 8:30 p.m. Dinner is provided.

The remainder of the 2005 schedule is as follows:
July 6 – August 24 and
September 28 – November 16.
To register, please call (313) 794-5546.



Detroit Public School Closings: Support Surviving Schools, Students

Thirty-two Detroit Public Schools will close in the fall as part of the school district’s plan to “right size” the number of schools to meet public demand. It’s important to note that strong schools remain open.

As the district reorganizes to fulfill students’ needs, parents are urged to support them by becoming

involved in their education. Parental participation is paramount not only to the success of their children, but to the success of all Detroit Public Schools students.

Last fall, parents, teachers, and community activists united in victory against a state takeover of the Detroit school system. Sen. Clark-Coleman is a member of the Transition Team that is

helping the school district move from an appointed board to an elected board.
It is highly anticipated that Detroit school officials and various employee unions will work out a plan that continues to educate students. Parents and the public must resolve to serve our children by working with the outcome of those negotiations.



Members of the Oakman Boulevard Community Association join Sen. Clark-Coleman as she recognizes their commitment to preserving a high quality of life in their neighborhood.